

Massachusetts Legislature.

THE COMMITTEE ON FEDERAL RELATIONS.

SPEECH OF HON. WENDELL PHILLIPS

FOR AID IN THE PRESERVATION OF THE

OLD SOUTH MEETING-HOUSE.

BOSTON:
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ADDRESS OF WENDELL PHILLIPS.

THE times which President Eliot has so eloquently described were hours of great courage. When Sam Adams and Warren stood under that old roof, knowing that with a little town behind them, and thirteen sparse colonies, they were defying the strongest government and the most obstinate race in Europe, it was a very brave hour. When they set troops in rank against Great Britain, a few years later, it was reckless daring. History and poetry have done full justice to that element in the character of our fathers, nothing more than justice. We can hardly appreciate the courage with which a man in ordinary life steps out of the ranks, makes the crisis, while no opinion has yet ripened to protect him, not knowing whether the mass will rise to that level which shall make it safe, — make a revolution instead of a mere revolt. But there was a much bolder element in our fathers' career than the courage which set an army in the field, — than even the courage which faced arrest and imprisonment and a trial before a London jury: that, as I think, was the daring which rested this government, after the battle was gained, on the character of the masses, — on the suffrage of every individual man. That was an infinitely higher and serenest courage. You must remember, Mr. Chairman, no State had ever risked it. There never had been a practical statesman who advised it. No previous experiment threw any light on that untried and desperate venture. Greece had her republics: they were narrowed to a race, and

rested on slaves. Switzerland had her republics : they were the republics of families. Holland had her republic : it was a republic of land. Our fathers were to cut loose from property, from the anchorage of landed estates ; they were to risk what no State had ever risked before, what all human experience and all statesmanship considered stark madness. Jefferson and Sam Adams, representing two leading States, may be supposed to have looked out on their future and contemplated cutting loose from all that the world had regarded as safe, — property, privileged classes, a muzzled press. It was a pathless sea. But they had that serene faith in God, that it was safe to trust a man with the rights He gave him.

Now, if you will go back to 1776 and 1789, and remember what the world had been before, you can appreciate the hardship which faced that dread responsibility, the courage of conviction which risked everything, literally everything, man holds dear on the soundness of an untried theory. They were neither madmen nor dreamers, but careful, conscientious statesmen. The stout-hearted courage and serene faith which led their Israel into that desert was of a far higher order than any which sets an army in the field.

We stand here to-day still trying that experiment. We stand here with the responsibility of holding up that venture. When seven hundred thousand men were added to the ballot list of Great Britain by a vote of the House of Commons, Lord John Russell leaped to his feet, as the vote was announced, saying, "Now, the first interest of every Englishman is the education of the masses." That is the consideration which every American who remembers this grand experiment should bear closely on his conscience.

Human learning, science, common knowledge, does not fortify a man against crime. It does not create character. That we know by abundant experiment. Learning does not

make a man moral. You can educate a brain so as to make it despise violence, — only to fall more in love with adroit cheating. What is called civilization drives away the tiger, but breeds the fox. Mere intellectual education only changes the character of crime. When you speak of an educated mass as the safety of a republic, it is not the education of books, mere items of knowledge, mere reading and writing. Emerson says, "The Yankee has more brains in his hand than other races have in their skulls." Still the Yankee is correctly represented by a Congress which finds no time to legislate, all its hours being consumed in watching the tricks and counterworking the dishonesty of its members.

France has proved, and it has been proved in a variety of cases, that this sort of education does not make a State safe. It is the education, the training, that results in *character*. It is the education that is mixed up with this much-abused element which you call "sentiment." It is the education that is rooted in emotions, — of slow growth, the result of a variety, an infinite variety of causes; the influence of books, of example, of a devout love of truth, reverence for great men, and sympathy with their unselfish lives; the influence of a living faith, the study of nature, keeping the heart fresh by the sight of human suffering and efforts to relieve it; surrendering one's self to the emotions which link us to the past and interest us in the future, and thus lift us above the narrowness of petty and present cares; using ourselves to remember that there is something better than gain and more sacred than life, — yes, and that is to throw life away in what foolish men call rash, but wise men see to be brave deeds, and which, while it leaves us poor, leaves the world better than we found it.

The profoundest scholar of his day said, "No man is wiser for his learning," — a sentiment which Burke almost echoed; and Wordsworth said of the dark Napoleon days,

“A few strong instincts and a few plain rules,
 Among the herdsmen of the Alps, have wrought
 More for mankind, at this unhappy day,
 Than all the pride of intellect and thought.”

It is this — the *character* of these forty millions in these forty States — which is to make this second century of universal suffrage safe. It is not the common-school system alone, it is not either the higher or the lower level of education: it is that education that results in *character*, — not in mere knowledge.

Everything, therefore, that goes to make up character is the first consideration of a State resting on a republican basis. The State should create this influence whenever it can, and save and second it wherever it exists. This is one reason — a very grave one, it seems to me — why this earnest effort to save one of the most suggestive and most remarkable monuments of State history deserves State aid. I hold it of exactly as much importance, and in certain points of view of more importance, that the State shall preserve its monuments, shall minister to the emotions and sentiment of its people, as that it shall provide them with school-books. That monument on Boston Common is equal to a ton of school-books; and while it speaks of gratitude to the men who gave their lives that our flag might mean justice, it lifts us to their level and moulds us to their likeness. Webster remembered this when consecrating Bunker Hill Monument. He said its object was not an historical record merely, but “that human beings are composed not of reason only, but of imagination also and sentiment; and that is neither wasted nor misapplied which is appropriated to the purpose of giving right direction to sentiments and opening proper springs of feeling.”

Allusion has been made to the character of different States. I hope I shall not, as an individual, exhibit any

self-conceit when I speak of New England. But I look upon New England as the sheet-anchor of these forty States. I think in the reverence for antiquity, in the sentiment which lies at the root of a New-Englander's character, in the value set on old towns and places and families and relics, in the fondness for searching out their connection with the roots of English ancestry, — in much that distinguishes a New-Englander, — there is a large element of that character necessary for the permanence of our institutions. And why I value it especially is that, considering the fermenting masses, especially in the southern sections of the country, I look upon New England, with its ideas and principles, its sense of justice, high level of civilization, tone of honor and patriotism, and serene faith, spite of all doubts, in the absolute necessity of saving that experiment which Jefferson launched, — I look upon *this* New England as the very centre, or right wing, of the battle for the permanence of republican institutions here.

I do not value universal suffrage, Mr. Chairman, simply as a catch-word, "representation and taxation," simply as a logical formula touching the man that pays and his right to follow what he pays. Universal suffrage has a broader value. God makes it his method, to borrow a French word, of securing the "solidarity" of the people, making the unity of all classes. When an Englishman looks down into a poor man's cradle, if he stoops to that helpless child, he does not do it from any anxiety. He knows that there is no probability, with the army and the deep-rooted institutions of his country between him and it, of that child's ever being able to lift its hand against his order or his wealth. So if he interferes, he interferes solely from love and pity. But when Wall Street looks down into a poor man's cradle, Wall Street remembers, with prompt selfishness, that in due time that baby hand will wield the ballot, and unless it has-

tens to put intelligence on one side and integrity on the other of that baby footstep, its own wealth is not safe. I thank God for that democracy which takes bonds of culture and wealth to share their ripest advantages with the humblest soul God gives to their keeping! Social conventions discuss the dangers of universal suffrage in cities; timid scholars tell their dread of it. True, it is a terrible power. It endangers peace and threatens property. But there is something more valuable than wealth, there is something more sacred than peace. As Humboldt says, "The finest fruit earth offers to its Maker is a MAN"; and the first object of government is to make a man, — to ripen and lift and broaden a man. Trade, law, learning, religion, are only the scaffolding whereby to build up a man. Therefore we should not shrink from dangers which beset this theory. We should remember its final use and grand tendency, and that God bids us earn safety by lifting that rotten, weak, and tempted mass to our own level, and only by so doing. This being our duty, every influence, even the weakest, that tends to make character should be carefully nursed.

I think that the State, on the broadest consideration of duty, is bound to give its citizens something more than the knowledge of arithmetic and geography. It does well to supplement the common school and the university with that monument at Concord. I passed through your Hall as I came up. For what has the State set up the bust of Lincoln there? A fortnight ago, I looked in the face of Sam Adams in the Rotunda at Washington. What did the State send that statue there for? It was only a sentiment! For what did she spend ten thousand dollars in setting up a brand-new piece of marble commemorating the man who spoke those words under the roof of the Old South? It will take a hundred years to make it venerable. It will take one hundred years to make that monument on Boston Common venerable.

You have got the hundred years funded in the Old South, which you cannot duplicate, which you cannot create. A package was found among the papers of Dean Swift,—that old, fierce hater, his soul full of gall, who faced England in her maddest hour, and defeated her with his pen, charged with a lightning hotter than Junius'. Wrapped up amid his choicest treasures was found a lock of hair. "Only a woman's hair," was the motto. Deep down in that heart, full of strength, fury, and passion, there lay this fountain of sentiment; undoubtedly it colored and gave strength to all that character. When they flung the heart of Wallace ahead in the battle, and said, "Lead, as you always have done!" what was the sentiment that made a hundred Scotchmen fall dead over it to protect it from capture? When Nelson, on the broad sea, a thousand miles off, telegraphed, "England expects every man to do his duty," what made every sailor a hero? If you had given him a brand-new flag of yesterday, would it have stirred the blood like that which had faced the battle and the breeze a thousand years? No, indeed! Nothing but a sentiment,—but it made every sailor a Nelson.

They say the Old South is ugly! I should be ashamed to know whether it is ugly or handsome. Does a man love his mother because she is handsome? Could any man see that his mother was ugly? Must we remodel Sam Adams on a Chesterfield pattern? Would you scuttle the "Mayflower" if you found her Dutch in her build?

But they say the Old South is not the Old South. Dr. Ellis told us how few of the old bricks remained, which was the original corner, and which really heard Warren. They say the human body changes in seven years. Half a million of men gathered in London streets to look at Grant. The hero of Appomattox was not there: that body had changed twice; it was only the soul. The soul of the Old South is there,—no matter how many or few of the original bricks remain.

It does not change faster than the human body ; and yet all the science in the world could not have prevented London from hurrahing for Grant or from being nobler when it had done so. Once in his life the most brutal had felt the distant and the unseen and done homage to the ideal.

Nourish and ripen this sentiment, which is one of the great, governing parts of character, exactly as you must minister to the knowledge of things and words and figures, if you mean to educate the people. It is the most important element of that education ; and if we mean to venture on another hundred years of this experiment, of resting the State on every adult man, his knowledge, his integrity, his self-control, you must educate the whole man. We have no right to throw this portion away, even if it were but a slight contribution. But this is a large and a generous one. Why did the newly levied troops, when they passed by Faneuil Hall and the Old South, break out into shouts ? No officer ordered them. It was not done by the tap of the drum. What was it in their hearts, that, before they left the old city to go down and carry justice to the Gulf, what was it that made them break out into shouts ? It was a something too valuable to be lost. This is no time to dispense with any of that element.

I can remember when I did not fancy the flag, — when to me it represented something to which I could not swear allegiance ; and I went abroad with some disgust towards the Stars and Stripes, for I knew the slave saw in it only the guaranty of his bondage. But I remember one day when I was in the harbor of Genoa, the "Obio" anchored there, covered with bunting to the very topmast. The Stars and Stripes floated gay on the breeze, and five thousand Italians in boats, covered with gala symbols, full of frolic, sailed around the vessel, shouting. I found I could not keep my heart down ; I had to remember and rejoice that I was an American.

That is the feeling which the Old South ministers to, and that is what we come here and ask you to help. The people have shown by their large contributions and incessant labor in this behalf that it is no transient, no local feeling; that it covers the State, permeates all classes, thrills every heart. Even if it should not succeed, this very effort of devoted women to rescue these walls from destruction, appealing to the best elements of Massachusetts character, — this very effort, if it should fail, would do more, perhaps, than ten common years to educate Massachusetts. It has been in itself an exceeding great reward, if it ends to-day. The canvass of Fremont was said, with great justice, to have been the normal school of the American people; and so if the old walls should fall, ingulfed in the maelstrom of trade, history will tell not only the faith and courage of the fathers, but also the loving struggle of the children to save that sacred roof, that it might teach posterity as profound a faith and stir as loving and devoted patriotism as it has done hitherto.

I have no sympathy with the feeling that we are too poor. When one of this type remonstrated against the ointment poured over him, saying, "Why was it not sold and the money given to the poor?" the broader wisdom, the generous philosophy of the great Master covered all our nature when he answered, "The poor ye have always with you." Ordinary cares may be attended to at ordinary moments by ordinary methods, but on grand occasions you must waive these petty rules. You must rise to the level where God calls you, and he calls us to-day to save the monuments to make our children brave and wise.

We crowd our streets with monuments, — what do we mean? Why do you set Everett here, and Sumner there, and Lincoln elsewhere, and Mann in front of your State House? They are there as mementoes of great lives, the real wealth of the commonwealth. Is not Massachusetts richer

for the memory of these men? Is not Massachusetts richer that Sam Adams lived here, that Harry Vane walked these streets, that where the Old South stands Sewall, in the majesty of his repentance, gave to magistrates the noblest example that has ever been set the world over? No hour in history has risen to a higher level. Is not that a lesson broad, deep, profound, permanent,—to teach a people the grandeur of humility, of integrity of purpose, of whiteness of soul? These are the treasures that enrich Massachusetts. These are the things we hope you will save, and in saving them, save the very foundation and source of all good that is to come to the country. I may exaggerate the importance of New England, but I look elsewhere and I see wild projects, unbridled ambition, dissensions of race, quarrels between classes, ambition for new territory,—a hundred causes that threaten the permanence of this republic. Hardly any man can venture to hope, unless by great blessing, that a hundred years hence one flag will cover this continent. We are breaking into pieces, into half a dozen pieces, from a variety of causes. There is nothing that can hold us together but the sentiment of one country, one flag. How hard to ripen this sentiment! I have faith that a hundred years hence freedom will be the law from the Atlantic to the Pacific, but I do not know whether one flag will cover the continent.

It is only as far as I have faith to believe that the common school and the municipal institutions; the character of New England,—the seed and type of everything that is valuable in public life,—will spread over the continent, to the Gulf and to the West,—it is only in that faith that I believe these great States can hold together; and in order to that we must emphasize and intensify the New England character. I stood in this very hall fifteen years ago, with half a dozen others, and argued for the preservation of the Hancock House (I wish

it stood there to-day !), one of the half-dozen relics that gave Boston a past. We got a vote through both Houses, if I recollect right. You would like it to-day. We should not be obliged to climb five stories into this attic if you had that Hancock House to spread the offices of the State House into. It was offered to you cheaply in the matter of money, but you had not the sentiment to save it. I remember an Arkansas slaveholder who had never seen anything older than twenty-five years, standing with white lips and trembling knees on the door-step of that house ; and when I said to him, in answer to his question, "Did the man who signed the Declaration really touch that door-latch?" "Yes, and his body lay in state above it," he sat down upon the step and said, "I feel very strangely ; I never felt so before." It was the first stirring of a poetic sentiment working in the mind of a rude nature. Let it ripen, and his hand would be clasped with that of Boston so tightly that no theory of white race or black race could break the union.

Why throw away any means to make men nobler, to bind citizens into closer union and stir them to broader patriotism. Johnson said, "Whatever makes the past, the distant, or the future predominate over the present advances us in the dignity of thinking beings."

Save everything that tends to that. Search out and gather up all that so educates the soul. When the people toil and labor to prepare such teachers, intervene and make the work easier. You circumnavigate the globe to find men to teach skill. You tempt Agassiz from his birthplace to question Nature for her secrets. Save, sacrifice liberally to save, the teachers God has put in our streets, teachers of secrets better than any Nature can show,—of law, order, justice, freedom, brotherhood, self-sacrifice, the nobleness of that life which serves man, and the happiness of his death who leaves the world better for his having lived. Genius

can mould no marble so speaking as the spot where a brave man stood or the scene where he labored.

Mr. ADDISON DAVIS, of Gloucester, then addressed the committee in opposition to the petition, taking the ground that the Old South was a hideous structure, offensive to taste, and that the site was needed for stores, which would add largely to the taxable property of the city. He suggested that a handsome building could be erected there, upon the front of which might be placed an attractive model of the old church, which would answer every purpose of the present structure as a monument.



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